



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA
Venice Immersive

1932 90° 2022

Sorella's Story

Remember me...

SCREEN AUSTRALIA PRESENTS A SOUL VISION FILMS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY AND DALARNA UNIVERSITY
WITH PRODUCTION INVESTMENT FROM SCREEN QUEENSLAND SORELLA'S STORY

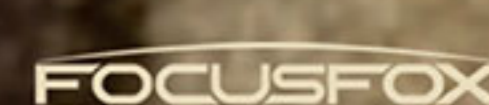
STARRING KIARA KALMÁR AND CHARLOTTE STENT

CINEMATOGRAPHER GILBERTO ROQUE EDITOR JEMMA POTGIETER SOUND DESIGNER PETER KURUCZ VFX ARTIST LOUISE HARVEY AND LEVI JOHNS

IMMERSIVE STAGING CONSULTANT TESS BRADING SCRIPT CONSULTANTS ETHEL DAVIS AND SARAH HOPE RESEARCH AMELIA PAXMAN

CO-PRODUCERS AXEL GRIGOR AND ANDRÁS MUHI PRODUCED BY PETER HEGEDÜS, JACLYN MCLENDON, BOBBI-LEA DIONYSIUS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PETER HEGEDÜS





(360 re-enactment)

Remember Me

Sorella's Story brings to life a smuggled atrocity photograph taken in Latvia in December 1941. In this immersive film, the audience follows 10-year-old Sorella on her final journey to the beach on the Baltic Sea where close to 4,000 people, mostly women and children, were murdered.



Country: Australia, Hungary, Sweden
Year: 2022
Runtime: 15'15"
Language: English

(360 re-enactment)

Sorella's Story transforms the story behind a single smuggled 1941 photograph, buried by history, into an unforgettable 15-minute immersive experience. Inside a VR headset, the viewer is transported to a 360° snowy landscape with 10-year-old girl Sorella Epstein.

Tragically, Sorella and almost 4,000 Latvian Jewish women and children were ordered to undress in freezing temperatures prior to a mass execution on a beach in Liepaja, Latvia during the Holocaust. *Sorella's Story* is a visceral reminder and warning of how prejudice can escalate to devastating tragedy. This impactful story invites the viewer to accompany Sorella and some of the women as they embark on their last journey, so that we never forget.

Peter Hegedüs

Peter Hegedüs' filmmaking career spans over 25 years. He has been making films since the age of 17 exploring human stories that shed light on identity, place and belonging. His work is characterized by a commitment to social justice be they documentary or drama.

Peter's work has been shown at major Film Festivals around the world including one of his documentaries *Inheritance a Fisherman's Story* being shortlisted for the Academy Awards and his latest 360 immersive story *Sorella's Story* having been selected for competition at the prestigious Venice International Film Festival. His critically acclaimed films have also won numerous awards and been broadcast in many countries.

Peter is also the Deputy Director for Research & Engagement at the Griffith Film School which is the biggest film School of its kind in Australia. Peter continues to participate in panel discussions and forums around the world concerning international financing, documentary ethics and directing. He has also been active in the non-governmental sector supporting key social justice organisations around Australia and Europe.



Director Peter Hegedüs with GFS Masters Students and Associate Producers Tess Brading, Sarah Hope and Amelia Paxman

Director's Statement

I wanted to be brave with this film...to pour all my energy into creating something that will go against the tide of Holocaust fatigue. To create an experience that will emotionally connect people across cultures, demographics and economic divides, to the Holocaust and alert them to how genocides are continuing to occur in our world.

I am the grandson of a Holocaust survivor. I have also personally experienced anti-Semitism and I've been looking for opportunities as a filmmaker to tell stories about the Holocaust that push boundaries and engage with new audiences.

My first documentary about the Holocaust EVA (2016) explored the incredible journey of Eva Fahidi, a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor. It was in my feature documentary LILI (2018) where I got to spend time developing new visual representation to the Holocaust. I arrived at this point having also made a number of short narrative films with the interest to blur the boundary between documentary and fiction. The main character of the film Lili Gardonyi was 8 when she witnessed 199 Jewish forced labourers massacred by Nazis during World War II. We illustrated her memories of the massacre via a fictional re-enactment that respectfully depicted the trauma, giving the footage a sense of realism.

Finding the photograph: It was through this process of wanting to land visual authenticity to the massacres in LILI that I came across a photograph on the web of a group of women and a child minutes before their execution by Nazi troops. Taken in December 1941, it shows Latvian Jewish women and a 11-year-old girl, Sorella Epstein, half undressed, in freezing temperatures on the beaches of Skede, near Liepaja, Latvia. As a filmmaker I was deeply moved by the plight of these women and felt compelled to tell their stories to elevate it from the oversaturated volume of trillions of photographic materials on the world wide web. I wanted to find a way to immortalise their stories for future generations, to emphasise how prejudice if not challenged can lead to extreme violence.



Skede Beach, Latvia 15 - 17 December 1941

I began investigating what happened to the women and gradually came to the realisation that apart from their names, there was little recorded evidence about their lives. So, I decided to write a fictional story about what happened whilst hanging onto every inch of historical data I could find. With this fictional approach, my focus shifted to Sorella, the 11-year-old girl in the photo. To me, she came to represent the 100s of children who - like her - lived full lives, who had dreams and who had hopes but their lives were unjustly cut short on the Latvian beaches.

To try and move away from the didactic historical teachings to render a more impactful connection to the Holocaust, I explored innovative ways to tell the story. I came across 360° film technology and its use in Chris Milk's CLOUDS OVER SIDRA (2015) as well as in Lynette Walworth's COLLISIONS (2016) and was blown away. You could put on a set of goggles and then find yourself in a new world, witnessing the story unfold. What was even more important to me, is that I realised that we can utilise this technology to engage audiences with critical social justice themes.

I began to imagine SORELLA'S STORY in 360° space. We shot the film in Hungary using professional and semi-professional actors almost exactly on the same dates as the massacre that happened 78 years earlier. The locked off 360° camera did not allow for close ups. I was concerned about the creative limitations offered by this technology. We had to treat each scene as if we were shooting a stage performance. Therefore, we had conducted numerous test shoots before the day of production, to get our blocking precise and to evaluate whether the performances of the actors would be visible enough given their positioning to the camera.

After our principal photography, we viewed the material we shot and realised that we were wrong to think that the static 360° camera angle and the technology itself limited our choices when it came to exploring creative treatment for our story and expanding on what was possible in this new realm. What also became immediately apparent when viewing the footage is that thanks to the static nature of the 360° footage with locked off camera, the look landed authenticity in depicting the horribly mundane and pointless nature of any massacre. No quick cuts, no close ups, dramatic music and no time to look away: only the long, drawn-out images of people, soldiers embedded in the landscape.

Further, to transition from one scene to the next we'd wanted to avoid the conventional fades in between our scenes which I felt broke up the flow and dramatic build-up of our story. Instead, we introduced the "dark matter" concept into our story that now serves to illustrate Sorella's world. This dark matter pulses as the story evolves moving in and out. It engulfs Sorella's world threatening life. A key narrative element became having Sorella's voice guide the viewer throughout the journey. With her guidance, the audience bears witness to her journey. Her voice allowed us to humanise Sorella and the other women to counter the dehumanisation by the Nazis.

What has been challenging throughout this process is to tread carefully around Latvian involvement in this massacre and in the Latvian Holocaust as a whole. I found that whilst the majority of Latvians I encountered embraced the project and without their help this film could not have been made. However, the film also made some uncomfortable and even defensive when it came to highlighting Latvian collaboration with the Nazis. It is critical to state that the film is not a historical account of what exactly happened to the women and the children. It is fictionalised, influenced by my own creative treatment as a filmmaker. One of the decisions I made was to allow the Latvian soldiers to wear a Latvian armband to demonstrate Latvian involvement even though this may not have been historically correct. However, I was also mindful to depict the fact that the Nazi Germans were the ones who literally -behind the camera - orchestrated a lot of the exterminations. The 360-camera also allowed for this truth to be revealed.

The film culminates into connecting the fictionalised world with the actual atrocity photograph that inspired the project in the first place. We have positioned our actors the same way the women and Sorella are standing in the photograph. This concluding sequence will celebrate the names of the people who perished in the massacre. The names are read out by ordinary people from around the world who are currently the same age as those who were killed - and importantly we will utilise the 360° space to maximise impact. For example, Simon Fleischer was 4 years old when he was killed in this massacre and so we have found a 4-year-old boy to read out Simon's full name which would then be physically written out along the 100s of other names in this 360° space.



Cast Statements



Kiara Kalmár

playing Sorella Epstein

To Never Forget was an especially memorable experience for me. One of the reasons was that we were using a 360 degree camera, which I had never used during filming before, so all the crew members had to hide when it was rolling. We moved locations a couple times, since some of the movie includes being moved by a truck. While we were shooting the scene where a German soldier gets shot, I was supposed to cry in the movie. However, we had to reshoot it multiple times because the others all made me laugh! I really will never forget To Never Forget. I can also say the same about the movie Lili that I was in. This movie was directed by Péter Hegedűs as well. That one was an incredible experience to me as well, partly because of how I got to act out someone's childhood memories. These two movies were really amazing to be in.

Charlotte Stent

Voice Over for Sorella Epstein

When I was presented with the opportunity to voice Sorella's story, I had no idea just how much this experience would impact, educate and create many powerful emotions within. Working on this important project with Peter Hegedus is an experience that was incredibly humbling and valued immensely. The intensity of the script, viewing the atrocity photograph of Sorella among other Latvian Jewish women, taken just prior to their execution, and viewing the footage created by Peter and his team, Sorella's Story provided an introduction to the enormity and horrific events that occurred during the Holocaust, an invaluable insight for me as part of our younger generation. Being a part of this 360-Degree groundbreaking short film is an experience that I will never forget.



(photo credit Dana Little)

Producer Statements

Peter Hegedüs - Writer / Director / Producer

From little things big things grow. This is the best way to demonstrate the evolution of this project. When it comes to garnering interest for financial contribution, it was a particularly challenging journey. The proposition to create a 360 fictionalised film about the Holocaust sounded too experimental and risky even for funding agencies specialising in supporting film projects that aimed to maintain the memory of the Holocaust.

However, we were very lucky that Griffith University - and Griffith Film School (GFS) where I work – has had a strong tradition of supporting bold ideas as part of its research agenda, providing the film with a pivotal foundation with GFS having already set its eyes on developing a strategy for technological screen innovation. So, it was in this “creative nest” that *Sorella's Story* began to grow. In essence it was through story experimentation that the film was able to thrive and develop.

The crew was made up of a group of young, technically literate, and passionate Griffith Master students, gave the film its edge. I simply could not have made the film without the dedication and hard work of the Master students crew.

Production took place in Hungary, my country of birth. This is the place which resembled the conditions of our story given the cold climate, but it is also the place where I had the contacts to shoot a complicated film production. With the help of acclaimed producer Andás Muhi, I was able to put a skeleton crew and we managed to shoot the film in one single day.

I am also very fortunate to have had the assistance of other key creatives on this film including producers Jaclyn McLendon and Bobbi-Lea Dionysius who have worked tirelessly to support me in every way they could. Long time collaborator Axel Grigor was also a key partner who made the Dalanra University cash support a possibility and was a passionate script consultant along the way.



(360 re-enactment)

Jaclyn McLendon - Producer

Sorella came into my life over a tea and coffee at a local café in South Brisbane in the middle of 2020. Having spent close to a decade on the awards and industry side of filmmaking, the pandemic awoke a passion to be on the other side of conversation.

It was at this juncture I met with Peter Hegedüs who shared his vision for Sorella's Story, to keep the memory and lessons of the Holocaust alive by the ambition to reach younger generations and using innovative technology. I was hooked. Having strong personal values in diversity, inclusion and highlighting our humanity rather than focusing on our differences, this project spoke to me in a deep and meaningful way.

Of course, like the path Sorella and the women took to the beach, the road to getting this film made was rocky, but like all worthy projects the passion and support of our collaborators, such as Screen Australia, Screen Queensland, Griffith University, Dalrna University, and The Gandel Foundation has created a film that is unique and that is special. As I began talking about the project to friends, colleagues and random strangers, the personal urgency to deliver this project grew.

As we move into the distribution of the Sorella's Story we invite the audience to walk the path alongside Sorella, we invite conversation, we invite further understanding of massacres, genocides, and atrocities, because they are still happening. The film is set in 1941, but the warning is as valid and as urgent today.

Sorella's Story will stir something inside of you, it will remind our audiences of the horrors that can occur if we stand by and will echo in your subconscious to inspire a more tolerant, open, and supportive community.

That is our hope.



The memorial site in Skede Beach today (image: Robert Klepis)

Bobbi-Lea Dionysius - Producer



Having worked with Peter on his last feature documentary, *LILI*, as the producer of marketing and distribution, I was familiar with the social issues and impact landscape of the Holocaust which is a recurring theme in Peter's work.

Studies have shown that many of the younger generation have a limited understanding of the Holocaust and the memory is slowly fading. Given that prejudice is still rife in the world, it is imperative to keep the memory alive as a stark warning of the devastation that prejudice can lead to.

We felt the best way to reach a younger audience was through new innovative technology - a 360 short film. 360 immersive technology also has the added power to engage the viewer in a way that is visceral - they can almost feel the snow. This creates a deeper emotional connection to the content and in turn, we hope it will create a greater empathy, understanding, and tolerance for those who come from different cultural backgrounds to our own.

Through the generous support of the Gandel Foundation, we have been afforded the opportunity to do a roadshow of the 360 short film, along with thirty-five VR headsets, which will also be accompanied by a documentary companion piece, which delves deeper into the inspiration behind the story of the 360 film, and its contemporary context.

We will be collaborating with the Melbourne Holocaust Museum to provide the screening guide and educational toolit, while ensuring a safe in / safe out protocol for the sensitive and emotively evocative content which some people may find challenging to experience.

Sorella's Story is not only a work of art, but a continual plea for a more humane society.

Axel Grigor - Co-Producer

When used effectively, new modes of storytelling have a magical ability to disperse the fog of time and bring history into sharp relief. Past lives and voices suddenly gain new agency to affect audiences in the present.

With *Sorella's Story*, Peter Hegedus and his international team – including a film student from Dalarna University in Sweden – have managed this feat to an extraordinary degree. By employing VR360 technology to interrogate the 1941 atrocities on Skede Beach in Latvia, we are given a powerful new way to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

Dalarna Audiovisual Academy (DAVA) is proud to have contributed to the creative evolution of this extraordinary immersive project and looks forward to supporting its much-anticipated rollout worldwide.



JFS Master students and Associate Producers' Statements



Gilberto Roque - Cinematographer

The production of *Sorella's Story* was my first opportunity to shoot in 360. The approach is powerful in that viewers immerse themselves in the narratives enhancing their experience to experience the story.

Since the early stages of the project, my curiosity of filming in 360 was motivating me. I have always been curious about new technologies so I embraced the opportunity. At first, my mindset was on traditional 2D production. I soon changed my approach as a cinematographer because 360 freed us from the limitations of the traditional cameras and at the same time imposed new challenges. I feel that we were able to create a link between the audience and the people whose stories are being told.

Tess Brading - Immersive Staging Consultant, Video Stitching, Liepaja Beach Scene Filming & Stitching, Cast

My work on *Sorella's Story* was one of the most challenging, exciting, and rewarding experiences of my life. I was asked to be a part of the team prior to the initial test shoot after telling Peter about my interest in immersive storytelling. Now, three years later, my entire professional and artistic practice is in designing virtual reality experiences and immersive storytelling. This film set me on a career changing journey and opened up so many new avenues for me. Working on set in Latvia and Hungary and dealing with the sensitive and difficult subject matter of the film was an emotional experience, but I couldn't have asked for a better team of dedicated storytellers to do it with. My primary role on set was in immersive staging. This essentially meant making sure the action recorded on set would translate to a seamless product when stitching the footage and managing the unique challenges specific to 360° postproduction from both a technical and storytelling standpoint. The whole team was genuinely invested in the story of *Sorella* and in doing her justice. We worked tirelessly together to manage whatever surprises came our way and, despite the difficulties we faced, I wouldn't trade my involvement in this film for anything.



Sarah Hope - Script Consultant, Researcher, Cast



Working on '*Sorella's Story*' as researcher, script consultant and cast member, was a significant experience in my career and personal development. While collaborating with skillful and intelligent colleagues all dedicated to a common goal, the process deepened my understanding of writing stories for screen in the 360 medium. I also had the pleasure of creating in a cross cultural context and performing alongside the talented Hungarian and Australian cast. While the world remains scarred by the Holocaust and continues to grapple with war and genocide, it is of vital importance for us as story tellers to create contemporary narratives about children like little *Sorella*. Through projects like Peter Hegedus' '*Sorella's Story*', we humanise and honour those lost in horror and deepen a connection to these historical events for new generations. I grew so much through the challenges and joys of working in another country on this important true story and in the context of 360 filmmaking.

*Jemma Potgieter - Editor,
Video Stitching, Sound Recordist*

I was interested in working on *Sorella's Story* because I had the opportunity to learn a completely new type of filmmaking- 360 degrees- and to experiment with how this method affects storytelling. We were jumping over every obstacle you can imagine to get the film made- from political issues abroad, to flight changes, to the weather! And since 360 is still very new technology, I had to learn the software from scratch to stitch and edit the film. It is a great achievement for us all to finally be able to share this story with the world.



*Amelia Paxman - Researcher
Liepaja Beach Scene Filming & Stitching*

There aren't many opportunities in life where you can learn a new skill as part of a collective. Working on the 360 film together was exciting, and meant supporting each other to take creative and technical risks. However the learning curve grew much steeper once we factored in learning more about Latvian history, culture and the context we'd be working in. Having the privilege to travel overseas and work with people who had vastly different perspectives and life experiences was challenging, eye-opening and incredibly enriching. Coming face to face with the legacy of the Holocaust in Latvia was particularly confronting. The whole experience has inspired me to reflect on our own history in Australia, and which parts of it we, as a nation, would prefer not to talk about. My work on the project has increased my ability to navigate different cultures, improved my technical confidence and will certainly have an influence on my future films.



GFS Masters Students Amelia Paxman and Tess Brading

Credits

Director, Writer, Producer
Peter Hegedüs

STARRING

Sorella Epstein
Kiara Kalmár

Sorella Epstein's Voice
Charlotte Stent

Producers
Jaclyn McLendon
Bobbi-Lea Dionysius

Co-Producers
Axel Grigor
András Muhi

Associate Producers
Amelia Paxman
Sarah Hope
Gilberto Roque
Jemma Potgieter
Tess Brading

CAST

Roza Epstein or Miriam Purvie
Erzsébet Zernovác

Fruma Purvie Éva
Anna Szabó

Nomy-Naima Jankelowitz
Eszter Szabó

Maika Mia Epstein
Laura Libor

Woman in the Back Row
Sarah Hope

Latvian Soldiers
Peter Hegedüs
Tibor Héger
István Takács
Sándor Hegedüs
András Mészáros
Mikael Rosén

Nazi Photographer
László Kassai

Nazi Officers
András Hegedüs
Imre Csók
Gábor Bokor

Captured Latvian Women
Tess Brading
Kitti Vesze

CREW

Cinematographer
Gilberto Roque

Editor
Jemma Potgieter

Sound Designer
Peter Kurucz

Immersive Staging Consultant
Tess Brading

Script Consultants
Ethel Davis
Sarah Hope

Researcher
Amelia Paxman
Sarah Hope

Line Producer
Ágnes Székely

Sound Recordist
Szabolcs Gáspár
Jemma Potgieter

**Production Co-ordinator
(Australia)**
Isabella Haack

1st Assistant Director
Kitti Vezse

Production Designer
Gábor Bacsó

Costumes
Kolos Schilling

Military Expert
István Takács

Make Up Artist
Alexandra Nyúl

Video Stitching
Jemma Potgieter
Tess Brading

**Liepaja Beach Scene Filmed &
Stitched By**
Tess Brading
Amelia Paxman

VFX Artist
Louise Harvey
Levi Johns

Production Assistants
Réka Remzső
Karim Hema
István Rusvai
Kata Rusvai-Czédli
Bálint Hajnes
Péter Diós
Mikael Rosén

Truck Driver
Róbert Tasnádi

360 Technical Consultants
Carlos Chegado
Ben Richards

Casting
Mystic Production
Gilchrist Management

Screen Australia presents a Soul Vision Films production.
Produced with the assistance from Screen Queensland.
Produced with the assistance of Griffith Film School, Griffith University.
Produced with the assistance of Griffith University, Disrupting Violence Beacon.
Produced with the assistance of Focus Fox.
Produced with the assistance of Dalarna University.

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The 360 film's educational program proudly supported by Gandel Foundation and facilitated through the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.



Director Peter Hegedüs, Producers Jaclyn McLendon & Bobbi-Lea Dionysius
and GFS Masters Students and Associate Producers Sarah Hope, Amelia Paxman Gilberto Roque, Jemma Potgieter & Tess Brading



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